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BOOKS

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Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Her Friends

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON. As revealed by her letters, diary and reminiscences. Edited by Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch. Harper & Brothers.

THE story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, as revealed by her letters, diary and reminiscences, leaves one breathless with admiration for her sheer vitality, amazing energy and unconquerable liveliness. There seems to be nothing that she did not think about and little that she did not do in her long career. Theodore Tilton wrote in a letter, "I have known you for more than forty years, in more than forty different characters—suffragist, journalist, lecturer, historian, traveler, prophetess, mater familias, housekeeper, patriot, nurse, baby tender, cook, milliner, lobbyist, parliamentarian, statistician, legislator, tea pourer, story teller, satirist, kite flyer, chess player and I know not what else"—and this list does not begin to describe the many sided personality disclosed in the two volumes edited by her children, Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch.

The younger generation may conceive pioneers of woman suffrage as solemn, earnest creatures, endlessly lecturing and moralizing. But Mrs. Stanton was not that variety of reformer. Above all she was a lovable human being, with merry, dancing blue eyes and an inimitable sense of humor. She was devoted to her family, absorbed in her friendships and as eager to play, tell stories, dance and enjoy a good time as if there were no such thing in the world as the woman movement. Her public services are well known; how she inaugurated the suffrage movement in this country; called the famous woman's rights convention of 1848, founded a national woman suffrage association and was its president for more than half a century. The value of this new book is its vivid portrayal of the woman behind the work, what she thought, what fired her to labor for all the friendless causes of her day, how she managed to bring up a large family, have a brilliant career and know intimately all the great men and women of her period; in short, the real Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

II.

Through the chronicle which describes her childhood in Johnstown, N. Y., with her austere father, who never really forgave her for being a girl; her school days at Troy Seminary; her marriage and life with her children, is a background of those stirring days of the abolitionist movement and the civil war. There are portraits and intimate glimpses of William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore Parker, Wendell Phillips, Whittier, Emerson, Alcott, Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone and a host of others who were deep in temperance, anti-slavery, educational reform and equal suffrage. Indeed, the book might well have been named "Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Her Friends," she is so generous in sharing the stage with them.

Naturally, because of her lifelong association with Susan B. Anthony, Mrs. Stanton dwells much on their work together. She describes the first meeting with Miss Anthony and how much she liked her, "with her good, earnest face and genial smile, dressed in gay delaine." She speaks of seeing her Quaker friend, coming for one of her frequent visits, bringing always that famous portmanteau, "stuffed with facts." "When it was opened," she says, "there we had what the Rev. John Smith and Richard Hoe had said; false interpretations of Bible texts, the statistics of women robbed of their property, shut out from some college, half paid for their work, the report of some disgraceful trial; injustice enough to turn any woman's thoughts from stockings and puddings. Then we would get out our pens and write articles for papers or a petition to the Legislature, indite letters to the faithful, here and there; stir up women in Ohio, Pennsylvania or Massachusetts; call on the *Lily*, the *Una*, the *Liberator*, the *Standard* to remember our wrongs. We never met without issuing a pronunciamento on some question. In thought and sympathy we were one, and in the division of labor we exactly complemented each other." Later in a letter to Miss Anthony she recalls her husband's remark, "You stir up Susan, and she stirs the world!"

With considerable humor Mrs. Stanton describes the venture of early suffragists into dress reform. For a few years—in fact, until they believed that more energy was going into the struggle to wear the bloomer costume than into the woman movement—many of them dressed in short skirts with long trousers showing beneath; others wore a sort of Turkish regalia. In these days, when the world is a vast expanse of hosiery and a long skirt marks the wearer as conspicuous, it is difficult to even imagine what wearers of "the shorts" endured. Crowds gathered in the streets to see them pass, small boys hooted and threw stones, there were facetious songs and cartoons in the newspapers and conventional friends refused to receive them or to be seen in their company. A letter of Mrs. Stanton's to her son in school is characteristic, not only of her views on the matter of dress, but of her attitude toward conformity:

"SENECA FALLS, October 14, 1851.

"DEAR NEIL:

"You do not wish me to visit you in a short dress! Why, my child, I have no other. Now, suppose you and I were taking a long walk in the fields and I had on three long petticoats. Then suppose a bull should take after us. Why, you, with your legs and and arms free, could run like a shot, but I, alas! should fall a victim to my graceful, flowing drapery. Like the deer, you remember in the fable, my glory would be my destruction. My petticoats would be caught by the stumps and the briars, and what could I do at the fences? Then you, in your agony, when you saw the bull gaining on me, would say: 'Oh, how I wish my mother could use her legs as I can.' Now why do you wish me to wear what is uncomfortable, inconvenient and many times dangerous? I'll tell you why. You want me to be like other people. You do not like to have me laughed at. You must learn not to care for what foolish people say. Such good men as Cousin Gerrit and Mr. Weld will tell you that a short dress is the right kind. So, no matter if silly, ignorant persons do laugh. Good night to both of my dear boys.

"YOUR MOTHER."

Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

This willingness to stand up bravely for any principle she felt right is the dominant motive of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's life. One feels that she was endowed with more backbone than the average human being. Although good humored and able to win adherents through sheer charm of personality, she was not in the least afraid either to declare or write an honest opinion. Some of her letters are marvels of candor. When, after the long participation of suffragists in the anti-slavery crusade, one wing of the abolitionists was opposed to enfranchising women at the time the vote was conferred upon the negro, she wrote briefly to Wendell Phillips:

"DEAR FRIEND—May I ask in reply to your fallacious letter just one question based on the apparent opposition in which you place the negro and woman? My question is this: Do you believe the African race is composed entirely of males?"

III.

It is, of course, important to study the "History of Woman Suffrage" and other great books on the objective side of the movement, but Mrs. Stanton's spicy anecdotes and comments make better reading and throw valuable light on the whole drama as well. She has much to relate of campaign trips through the Western States, chance meetings on trains, encounters with suffrage opponents at legislative hearings and debates, visits with lonely women on distant farms, and all that human, friendly contact that comes to those who travel for a cause. Speaking of the technique of distributing tracts, she observes: "Like all things, it requires great discretion in sowing leaflets lest you expose yourself to a rebuff. I never offer one to a man with a small head and high heels on his boots, with his chin in the air, because I know, in the nature of things, that he will be jealous of superior women; nor to a woman whose mouth has the 'prunes and prisms' expression, for I know that she will say, 'I have all the rights I want!' "

Despite the courage and the whimsical philosophy which made her such a gallant crusader, there were bitter times to record in the diary. Her father was severely opposed to her views and sometimes her husband did not approve of her stand. Then, too, she was more radical than the majority of her coworkers, willing to take a more militant attitude on such subjects as marriage and divorce. One letter to Susan B. Anthony stands out among all the others as an expression of her caliber. It is on the subject of changing the name of the suffrage magazine. "As to changing the name of the *Revolution*," she says, "I should consider it a great mistake. If all these people who for twenty years have been afraid to call their souls their own begin to prune us and the *Revolution* we shall become the same galvanized mummies they are. There could not be a better name than *Revolution*. The establishing of woman on her rightful throne is the greatest revolution the world has ever known or ever will know. To bring it about is no child's play. You and I have not forgotten the conflict of the last twenty years—the ridicule, persecution, denunciation, detraction, the unmixed bitterness of our cup for the past two years when even our friends have crucified us. A journal called the *Rosebud* might do for those who come with kid gloves to lay immortal wreaths on the monuments which in sweat and tears others have hewn and built, but for us, and that great blacksmith of ours (Parker Pillsbury), who forges such red hot thunderbolts for Pharisees, hypocrites and sinners, there is no name like *Revolution*."

IV.

The book abounds in contrasts. Here we see her the uncompromising advocate of all kinds of advanced causes and philosophies. On the next page is a witty account of housekeeping struggles, encounters with a cook, tales of misdoings of the children, such as Henry's testing of a newly invented life preserver by setting his baby brother adrift in the Seneca River, stripped and equipped with a string of corks under his arms. She was an inveterate doctor and preferred her own varieties of medicine and treatment to those of established physicians. Indeed, she had not a little local fame, and used to visit a neighboring Irish settlement equipped with little boxes of homeopathic pills. She was an ardent advocate of "the great Hahnemann and the angel Homeopathy," although it is doubtful if her enthusiasm would have entirely pleased that learned gentleman. For, she writes in her diary while on one of her European sojourns, "We have all had colds. I tried in succession bryonia, sulphur, arsenicum, china, phosphorus, carbo vegetabilis and spongia, and I am well; but which of the seven remedies did the work I do not know. But Hattie took nothing and got well too!"

Perhaps much of that abounding vitality was due to her insistence upon hygiene. She was a fresh air "fan" before the cult was at all general. "Throughout my lyceum journeys," she remarks, "I was of great use to the traveling public in keeping the ventilators in the cars open and the dampers in fiery stoves shut up, especially in sleeping cars at night." As an advocate of the rights of children she was as earnest as in her suffrage appeal. In her travels she was always helping tired mothers and those who did not know how to take care of their babies. "Many, through my intercessions, received their first drink of water and were emancipated from woolen hoods, veils, tight strings under their chins and endless swaddling bands." Long before the day of athletics she declared: "I believe in the religious influence of exercise—I place the gymnasium above the 'meeting house' for boys on the threshold of manhood."

It is sometimes said that the pioneer suffragists cared only for the political aspect of feminism. This was not true of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. To her the vote was only the beginning of freedom for women. There is scarcely a subject under consideration by the feminists of this generation which was not included in her program and discussed by her in the hundreds of addresses, appeals and articles that poured from her pen from 1848 to 1902. Do we want

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